

# Warfare in the Pacific

*BATTLE FOR THE SOLOMONS.* By Ira Wolfert. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1943. 199 pp. \$2.

Reviewed by RAYMOND HOLDEN

TO those Americans who, when they have thought about battles at all, have thought of them as deliberate, relentless, front-to-front combat between two opposing forces, the conflict which Ira Wolfert describes as "Battle for the Solomons" will be very hard to visualize and even harder to understand. In spite of the fact that we speak of it as if it were a minor engagement, it is actually one of the greatest and most extensive battles of all time. The field on which it is fought and over which the forces of air, sea, and land which take part in it must be deployed, consists of some 250,000 square miles of land and sea and a million or more cubic miles of air. It is a battlefield upon which are being tested tactics which have never been used before. The outcome of its events may greatly influence not only the manner and method of future warfare but quite possibly the future of the human race as well.

The numerical strength of our land, sea, and air forces in the region of the Solomon Islands cannot be known to the public and probably is not known to the forces themselves. There is another kind of strength which can and should be made known and it is with this that Mr. Wolfert concerns himself. His book is an account of action in the Solomon Islands area during October and November, 1942. Naturally most of the action took place on, above, or near Guadalcanal. Some of it consisted of Marines moving through jungles, like raindrops down a window, in the face of fire from Japanese machine guns and 81 mm. mortars; some of it took place over the sea, as in the case of Lieutenant Loberg's Flying Fortress which suddenly found itself paired off with a Japanese Kawanishi 97 and stayed with the Jap through clouds, rain-squalls, and burning sun, trying always to keep on the inside of every turn, pumping lead into him and being pumped into in turn, for forty-four gruelling minutes until the Kawanishi went down in flames and the Fortress returned to Henderson Field with three of its crew wounded, one motor out of commission, several great holes in its wings, and six of its guns shot out. Mr. Wolfert was in Lieutenant Loberg's plane. He manages to make the reader feel like one of its crew.

Still more of the action in the Solomons took place at sea. From Guadal-

canal Mr. Wolfert watched that great mid-November fight in which the cruiser *San Francisco* distinguished herself. He saw the whole panorama of sea and air battle spread out before him but most of all he saw the Americans who were there doing a job, "the fellows" who "have taken a lot of abuse in the recent past from the newspapers and orators . . . and other warriors who were trying to scold and abuse and insult them into being tough about the depression, or food rationing, or soldiering. . . ." "But," says Mr. Wolfert, "all those words and insults and restrictions . . . don't seem to have convinced very many of them that there is anything done by any people or invented or manufactured by any people, that can keep an American from doing a job he really knows he has to do."

That is the publicly announced strength of the American forces in the Pacific and it must terrify the Japanese even more than what they do not know about our unannounced



Ira Wolfert

numerical strength. Mr. Wolfert has done a fine job of telling the world about it.

## Blood, and Sweat, and Pain

*GUADALCANAL DIARY.* By Richard Tregaskis. New York: Random House. 1943. 263 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MARK GAYN

AMERICANS are fighting today at a dozen key points, from the Aleutians to Algiers. In some areas—Iceland, England, Africa—their number runs into tens of thousands. Yet, no place on the globe holds for the American public more deep and immediate interest than the Solomons.

Richard Tregaskis's is the story of how a band of marines forged this interest out of a strip of sand and jungle. Of necessity, it is a story of blood and sweat, of pain, weariness, and angry curses, of a craving to do the job well, and then rush home, to normal comforts and friendly faces.

The story is told in the form of a diary. It opens on July 26, 1942, with a Sunday service on the rolling deck of a transport headed for "somewhere in the Pacific." The entry on August 7 describes in detail the landing at Guadalcanal, the fear of Japanese treachery, and the feeling of great relief when it became apparent the Japanese had bolted. On August 21, it reports the battle of Tenaru—and the entry supplies the most striking chapter of the book. In September, in the Battle of the Ridge, Tregaskis notes one of his many escapes from death. The diary closes on September 26, as he leaves the island in a bomber.

Most of the book is a report on what Tregaskis saw with his own eyes: Japanese bombers roaring overhead and dumping explosives nearby; the chase of his tug by a Japanese submarine; the rush to a foxhole during enemy shelling; the advance through enemy-infested jungle; the sight of fleeing Japanese being picked off like ducks in a shooting gallery by marine sharpshooters. This insistence on reporting only what he saw both deglamorizes the war and endows it with reality. Tregaskis's battles are no glorious compounds of mass charges, brilliant strategy, and heroic phrases. They are rather a combination of bullets whizzing overhead, filth, thirst, a wounded man groaning nearby, confusion, fear, and the joy of knowing that it's your tanks making mince meat of the Japanese across the stream, and not the other way around.

"The Guadalcanal Diary" is an honest book. Tregaskis set out to tell in simple words what he saw. He does it without fanfare or stylistic embellishments. Yet, the book somehow falls flat. It's interesting, but easily forgotten. It tells of jungle warfare; yet, it produces no clear image of the jungle. It depicts life on Guadalcanal; yet, after finishing the book, it is difficult to reproduce in one's mind the picture of an average day in the life of an average marine on the island. The book would have been much more satisfying were Tregaskis a bit of an artist, as well as a first-rate reporter.

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## Busy Man with a Ship

*H. M. CORVETTE.* By Nicholas Monsarrat. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co. 1943. 169 pp. \$1.75.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

THE best documented war in past history was probably that which centered around Napoleon; but except for Jonès, the three men of the Rifle Brigade, and John Nicol, that documentation comes almost exclusively from men with titles in front of their names and half the alphabet after them, and most of those noble lords are liars. The present unpleasantness bids fair to equal their record in quantity and to improve on it by a long way both in character and in quality, and the current volume is one of the better examples of why this is so. It is by a lowly figure of the British naval establishment, an extremely junior lieutenant of the "wavy navy" or R. N.V.R., who turned up at Clydeside



Nicholas Monsarrat

to take a post on a corvette—one of the earlier corvettes—then fitting out. He was an ex-yachtsman with literary tastes; she was a little tin pot with a tendency to roll on her beam ends at the slightest provocation, and they got along beautifully together.

Except for the boredom, Lieutenant Monsarrat was a busy man, of course, especially since the ship was so small that as Lieutenant (T), he had not only to double up as watch-keeper, but also to triple up as ship's medical officer, which is not done even in destroyers. But *H. M. Corvette* did pass periods of refit in port and in his navy the deck officers are not required or even allowed to fuss around the ship while the dockyard hands perform their offices. There were occasions even

when he had the bridge when he made notes of things that struck him as worth remembering. The remarkable thing is that so little of it all was worth remembering, so much mere repetition of what he had done and seen and experienced a million times before.

They ran Atlantic convoys on which the food progressively deteriorated since there was no refrigeration, and "then beans set in and biscuits ominously labeled with the name of a firm which, in peacetime was famous among dog lovers the world over." They learned to pray for dirty weather in which submarines are at a disadvantage, and they got it—my God, how they got it, with everyone clinging to something every blessed minute even in bed, or taking a broken bone. They had submarine alarms and fires and saw fire on the water in the night, and one of their consorts was torpedoed with all hands, which produced a temporary shakiness the Lieutenant does not try to disguise. They picked up thirty-odd garrulous Chinamen from a lifeboat; they uttered futile imprecations at the *Focke-Wulfs* which dogged them all day from beyond gun range. They went down to Gibraltar, and with the temperature at three figures the steward served them meals of nice, hot pork sausage and boiled potatoes in their jackets; they lay in a roadstead while the town was blitzed.

And it was all unutterably, unspeakably repetitious and boresome, only enough of the new in over two years of war to make a book of less than 175 pages, even when part of that book is taken up by an account of actually tipping over a U-boat, a happy accident which, on the statistics of the last war, can only happen to one in every fourteen vessels.

Maybe it's different this time; one hopes so for obvious reasons unconnected with the fact that there are more U-boats and not quite so many hunters. But it has been computed that the average is twenty-five minutes of actual combat for every four years of war and it certainly shows up in this narration. In a literary sense the remarkable thing is that this boredom can be conveyed in a book which is never in itself boring. The monotony is all between the lines, along with a good many other things. It is becoming a cliché by this time to talk about the British spirit or to read wider meanings into straightforward narrative about things observed, so perhaps the subject had better be dropped at this point; much better get on with the war and hope Lieutenant Monsarrat wangles a promotion to a destroyer and gives us another.

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